INTRODUCTION

Various global initiatives are taking place in the digital economy that aim to enhance global business trade and development, especially with regard to e-commerce. The International Chamber of Commerce - ICC (1997), for example, has been involved in a few initiatives aimed at promoting global trust in electronic trade transactions by defining, identifying, and deconstructing what constitutes best practices within the digital economy. The International Chamber of Commerce is a non-profit, private international organization that works to promote and support global trade. It also codifies and harmonizes world trade practices in various publications. The ICC focuses on three distinct areas, namely General Usage for International Digitally Ensured Commerce (GUIDEC); the Electronic Trade Practices Working Group; and

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E-terms Service. GUIDEC expects to instil trust in open electronic commerce by developing a common understanding of the mechanisms used to guarantee identities and authenticate transactions over electronic networks. GUIDEC was established to provide guidance in a market where different definitions in different jurisdictions threaten to undermine the utility of digital signatures in cross-border trade.

The Electronic Trade Practices Working Group functions as a set of founding rules for electronic trade and settlement. Its primary objective is to make trade more efficient by not only adapting rules to suit new technologies and media (such as the Internet), but by also taking advantage of these new tools to streamline trade transactions. This mandate is motivated by the fact that presently, most buyers and sellers in different parts of the world have no legal framework to cover how they conduct their negotiations, make contracts, and/or arrange for finance, transport or insurance online. Most of the rules that apply to international trade still presume the use of paper.

E-terms service is based on an online repository that contains the tools necessary to bring the level of legal risk down to a minimum while composing contracts online and/or conducting electronic transactions. Rules and directives of different kinds that may apply to different jurisdictions in the digital environment can be incorporated into electronic contracts by referring to a unique identifier automatically supplied by the e-terms repository. E-terms service can be useful to SMEs that do not have their own in-house legal expertise.

**NORTH AMERICAN DIGITAL ECONOMY INITIATIVES**

Countries in the developed world have a number of successful e-commerce initiatives that provide examples of best practices to those just starting to implement e-commerce programmes. In North America, both the United States and Canada have achieved high rates of e-readiness, with an e-commerce absorption rate of about 70%, placing them among the world’s leaders in e-commerce assessments. Canada has consistently been highly ranked in the global league of nations in e-readiness and e-government assessments. Among the initiatives that have been undertaken by the state, is *Government of Canada Online*, an official government website designed to make interactions with stakeholders, including businesses, a lot easier. The website is characterised by its focus on users, connectedness, tailor-made online services, and the integration of services (Government of Canada, 2006).

Canada has invested several billions of Canadian dollars in creating knowledge and encouraging innovation through various federal-level research and development funding initiatives. For example, every school and library in the country is
Collaborative Networks: Challenges for SMEs
www.igi-global.com/chapter/collaborative-networks-challenges-smes/76037?camid=4v1a